

## [\*\*The Bracelet by MelindaCoulson4\*\*](#)

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**Summary:**

Eleven prepares for her first dance. Hopper helps even though he isn't sure how, but he's trying his best. DadHopper feels.

## The Bracelet

He can't stare at the damn knit blanket draped over the back of the couch any longer. The zigzag pattern of the yarn seems like it'll be permanently engrained in the back of his mind. He's counted the number of stripes- there's 10 black, 7 yellow, and 16 orange- at least thirty times in a row. But he had to distract himself with something and that was the most menial thing he could do. Or he could go back to staring at the wooden door that's been closed for the better part of an hour now.

The ball of nerves in the pit of his stomach keeps gnawing at him. He's excited and afraid all at once. Tonight, El finally gets to go out in public. He and Dr. Owens had come to an agreement. El could go out for one night, three hours maximum, to the Hawkins Middle School Snowball dance.

She's been in her room getting ready: putting on the dress and applying makeup. She refused his offer to help, although he didn't really know how he could've helped if she accepted anyway. He knew nothing about fashion or makeup. He barely had a wardrobe himself, preferring to wear his uniform while working and flannels with jeans during down times.

When the decision was made, after he had thoroughly covered all of the rules for the night with El, he had turned to Joyce for help. She had told him where he could find a dress at some corner store in town that he's already forgotten the name of.

Of course everyone in town would get word that Jim Hopper was buying a dress for a little girl and that would create all kinds of attention that he didn't need, so he explained to the clerk how he owed a birthday present to some distant niece in California. To which the clerk nodded, rang up the dress, took the money, and barely gave him a second glance as he walked out of the store.

His eyes widen in surprise as the bedroom door slowly swings open, creaking from age along the way.

El peaks her head out from behind the cherry oak. The wavy curls on

the left side of her head fall across her face. He can spot the stark difference that the newly applied makeup has on her cheeks. They're much rosier than usual, almost as if she has a constant blush of embarrassment. It's nothing compared to the dark circles that she had caked around her eyes when she showed up at Joyce's house the night she closed the portal to the upsidedown. This time around, her face is free from any dark makeup, only lighter pale colors creating a softer look.

"Can you....help?" She asks hesitantly, her eyes casted towards the floorboards.

"Uh....yea....yes," he fumbles. He rises from his chair and walks over to the door that she's hiding behind.

She disappears back into the room before he reaches the door. He pulls it open so that he can follow her, but stops in his tracks at the sight before him.

"Wow you look...." He quickly blinks away tears, pride swelling inside of him. The denim blue dress fits her perfectly. The bottom of the dress hits her knee line and flutters around her gracefully with movement. Somehow it makes her appear even taller than she already is. She's gotten so mature in the months that they've spent together here, basically growing like a weed. "You look so beautiful," he compliments.

Joyce had lent him an armful of magazines earlier in the week. He didn't even ask for them. She just showed up at the station and dumped them on his desk, telling him that El had to have a baseline for the type of "look" that she wanted to have. El was a young girl who needed inspiration, classy inspiration Joyce had told him seriously.

A list with more than twenty beauty products had also been provided by Joyce. Things like mascara, blush, and eyeliner were on it, not that he even knew what those were at the time. Each item had a specific brand that he was to buy and a description of what it was used for scribbled in the margins, which was definitely helpful. He had tossed all of the makeup into a basket after carefully choosing the right ones at the store. Then, he paid for three bags full of

products and yes, he had received all sorts of raised eyebrows and barely concealed snickers from people in the store. None of that mattered anyway. He stopped caring what other people thought a long time ago. It was all worth it, to see the small grin plastered on El's face. If something made her happy, then he would do whatever it took to get it for her. She surely deserved it after all the hell that she's lived through.

He watches as El picks up something from her dresser and holds it out for him to take. He opens his hand, palm up, and she places a small piece of bright blue plastic in his hand.

Upon closer inspection, he realizes that it's a barrette shaped like a bow for her hair.

"Like this." She points to a page in one of the many half opened magazines cluttering her bed. It's a picture of a blonde-haired model with a clip holding a clump of hair against the side of her head.

"Okay....let's see," he says as he gently combs back the hair at the front of El's face with his fingers, so that it trails towards the back of her head. The barrette easily slides against her scalp and holds the hair between the two pieces. After some slight tweaking of the placement, he snaps the barrette in place.

"Ouch," she gasps and slightly flinches away from the hand he has in her hair.

"Sorry...sorry." He forgot how painful barrettes, hair ties, braids, and knots seemed to be in girls' hair. Sometimes he would help Sara or watch as his wife fixed her hair into ponytails or pigtails. There were always slight cries of pain when her hair was tugged the wrong way or if something got stuck in her hair.

El smiles at her reflection in the mirror. "Pretty," she murmurs as she admires the newly placed barrette in her hair.

He can't contain the happiness bursting in his chest. "Bitchin too," he adds.

It's like a little inside joke between them now. Whenever something

was exceptionally awesome it would automatically be labeled as bitchin by one of them.

She nods, meeting his eyes in the mirror. "Yes....bitchin." Her confidence almost bubbles over after she says it, agreeing with him.

He latches onto anything that reinforces her sense of self-esteem. If she wanted to consider herself as bitchin then so be it.

Something else that he's been debating pops into his mind. "I have something that would make this perfect," he tells her.

He leaves her room and goes straight to the bedside table in his room. He pulls open the top drawer and grabs the pink heart-shaped box, no larger than the span of his hand. The pink color has since dulled and become a more faded shade compared to its former florescence. It's a little beat up around the edges with peeling and scuff marks littering the top of it from the years of use. But the box itself has survived an innumerable amount of spills and drops. Sara used to keep her hair clips and hair ties in it, sometimes even a couple of crackers or grapes too. He's done his best to preserve it by keeping it hidden in the back of the top drawer of the table. In that spot, at least it's free from dust.

It still has all of the things that she had last left in it. It's the one thing of hers that he had allowed himself to keep close. There were many long nights where he would look through the contents over and over again searching for some semblance of comfort.

He opens the box, trying his best not to let his emotions get the better of him. A picture of he and Sara rests on top of all of the other keepsakes. One cool spring day at the zoo, he had lifted Sara onto his shoulders so that she could be closer to the giraffes and his wife had snapped a picture. He quickly tilts the picture to the side before getting lost in the memory and grabs the familiar blue hair tie. It was the match to the hair tie that he wore around his own wrist. Sara had worn pigtails all of the time and the blue hair ties were always her first choice, since blue was her favorite color.

He shut the lid, placed the box gently back into the drawer, and made his way back to El's room where he found her still seated in

front of the dresser mirror. He's been thinking about taking this step for a while now and had just realized that it was the perfect moment. When he was faced with the very real threat of losing her he finally accepted how much he needed her and loved her. The same way he felt about Sara, just like a daughter. El wasn't a replacement, but something new. There was room for the both of them in his heart.

"Here," he says, holding out the hair tie for her to take.

"What is it?"

His mouth falls open, yet he can't seem to find the right words to describe what it is. *A hair tie that I've kept for years that was my daughter's. Something that I've kept locked away and no one knows about it.* Finally, he settles on, "It's a special band that will keep you safe."

She raises an eyebrow at him after studying the item, seemingly unimpressed by the stretchy band.

He pulls his shirt sleeve up and taps the matching hair tie that he hasn't taken off of his wrist for years. "I wear the other one. There are two. It's a set. They belong together....so I thought you should have the other one. And you know...I've been wearing it for the past 5 years and I'm still alive after all of this craziness so.....it's gotta be the power of the band."

"Power of the band," she echos, staring at the hair tie resting in her palm.

"Yes," he confirms.

She slips it on her left wrist without hesitation. "Okay. We....belong together."

"Yes we do," he agrees, smiling. However, the smile slowly slips off of his face when he spots something else around her wrist. A bracelet; it's silver with a sea green gem in the middle of it. *Where could she have gotten a bracelet from?*

"Where did you get that?" He asks, gesturing to the bracelet.

Her eyes flicker away from his. "Momma," she whispers. "I wanted...."

He realizes that maybe she's ashamed or embarrassed. Maybe she thinks he's disappointed. He watches as she wraps her opposite hand around the silver band and slides it down, almost off of her fingers.

"To have a piece of her with you," he finishes her earlier statement. He knows better than anyone how it feels to desperately want someone with you even though it's impossible. So if she wants to wear her mother's bracelet, that's fine by him.

Her head snaps up, surprise clouding her features at his insight.

"I understand that.....keep it on." He gently wraps his hand around her wrist. Holding both the hair tie and bracelet together, both now a part of her. "That...." He touches the hair tie, the words come easily now, "used to belong to Sara....my daughter. Just like the one I wear did."

"Oh."

"I want you to keep it. It's yours now," he pauses, unsure if he should say what he's thinking. "You're my daughter too....in every sense of the word.....if you want to be," he quickly adds.

"Yes," she says, barely above a whisper while nodding vigorously. Then, unexpectedly throws her arms around his neck.

His hands automatically wrap around her back, cradling her in his grasp. All he wants is to shield her from the world forever, to never give anyone the chance to ever hurt her again. But, he knows that it's unrealistic.

"7...3..2....late!" She gasps, pulling away from his embrace quickly.

He can't help but laugh, remembering his own preteen excitement whenever he had the opportunity to be with his friends.

Tonight is all about letting her be free to be a kid and it's only for a couple of hours. He could stand to give her some freedom with her friends. Of course, he'll be waiting in the parking lot the whole time.

At some point he'll have to learn to let go and give her space, thankfully he won't have to learn just yet.

//End//

**Author's Note:**

If you enjoyed let me know :)